

CHRISTIAN DRAMA

Journal of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain

founded in 1929

by Sir Francis Younghusband, K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E., and Mrs. O. Stevenson

VOLUME 3

NUMBER 3

SPRING, 1956

Editorial

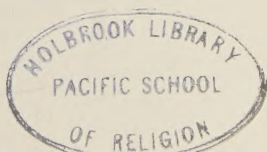
An unusually early Easter has meant even more concentrated hard work than usual on the part of groups tackling a Passion or Easter play. As we go to press, the icy weather must be adding to their Lenten penances. Nevertheless, every post brings in news of more plays in rehearsal, and we at the R.D.S. office send our wishes and prayers for all these ventures.

The Society wants to provide the most helpful and smoothly running service possible, and recently a concern has arisen to revise its work and hope in the light of recent developments in Religious Drama in this country. The Executive Committee held an all-day conference on Saturday, February 25th. Prayers were held in the Church of St. Mary-the-Virgin, Primrose Hill, from 11 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. The afternoon was occupied with a general discussion of policy and organisation.

King Alfred's College, Winchester, has been booked for the Summer School this year, and the programme of activities and recreation is now being planned. We are very glad to announce, in the meantime, that Mr. John Blatchley, who made so many friends at the Exeter School in 1952, has agreed to be a tutor again this year, and that Mr. Christopher Fleming, musical adviser to the R.D.S., will be in charge of music. Further details about the Summer School may be found on page 10.

Mr. David Linnell's work as agent for the New Pilgrim Players having terminated, the last meeting of the Executive appointed him as Public Relations Officer. An organiser of publicity has been much needed for a long time, and it is anticipated that the new arrangement will be a profitable one.

The time draws near for the R.D.S. to vacate the office at S.P.C.K. House. The removal of the S.P.C.K. will leave us without a home by the end of the summer, unless and until a new office can be found. At present we are still searching . . . and the only alternative (disconsolate house-hunters have been heard to say) to a hole in the Embankment is a hut in Hyde Park. . . . Any constructive suggestions would be most gratefully received.



Drama and Worship

J. ALAN KAY

We are apt to say in a loose kind of way that Christian Drama is an act of worship, but only in a limited sense is that true, and it will be good thing for us to ask ourselves exactly what we mean.

We use the word worship in two ways. In one of them we equate it with the whole of the Christian life. Worship in this sense is an offering to God, and since everything can be offered, everything can be worship; indeed, since everything should be offered, everything should be worship. We may, and should, offer to God not only the things we do in church on a Sunday, but the things we do elsewhere on a week-day—all of them: our work, our eating and drinking, the time we spend with our friends, our golf (even when we are playing badly), and our sleep (or our insomnia). Among all these things there are some which seem to us to be more obviously valuable to God than others, and we are perhaps more conscious that we are doing them to the glory of God. If we go to visit people who are ill, or do a piece of simple work for someone who is in difficulties, or help to run a youth club, we probably do it as a conscious piece of work for Christ; and if we undertake the work of a lay preacher, we are even more sure that we are making to God an offering and a sacrifice. But all these things, in so far as they are given to God, are acts of worship.

That Christian Drama may be, and often is, worship of this kind is very certain. No doubt there are some who embark on the performance of it merely for their own enjoyment; but if the play is a good one, and the producer both competent and Christian, they are apt to find that their motives become changed. No doubt, too, there are some who go to see it merely for their own entertainment; but again, if the play and the acting are good, they are apt to find that their time has been spent to the glory of God even if that was far from their original intent.

The word worship, however, has also a more particular use. In this sense, worship is what we do when we take part in the services of the Church; it is direct communion with God. It involves such activities as praise, adoration, confession, the accepting of God's forgiveness, the hearing of His Word, the receiving of His Spirit, the offering of thanksgiving, of prayer, and of the total self; it takes place through Christ, and in fellowship with the whole Church of God.

It is this more particular definition that we generally have in mind when we use the word worship; and when people speak of Christian Drama as an act of worship, it is very often something of this that they mean. What they have in mind is not merely that Christian Drama is worship in the sense in which doing one's daily work is worship, or in the sense in which running a youth club is worship, but in the sense that it corresponds in some way to the activity of a congregation in a Christian church. Religious plays have therefore sometimes been substituted for an ordinary church

service, with the idea that after all it is the same thing that is being done in a different form; and suggestions have not infrequently been made, that since religious drama is such an excellent medium of worship, it would be a very good thing to use it regularly as part of the Sunday services of the Church. These are assumptions, however, which need to be examined. Let us set out the difficulties that have to be faced.

First, it is obvious that as an act of worship, using the word in the more particular sense, drama will be seriously incomplete. It would, conceivably, be possible to incorporate nearly all the elements of worship into it, but it may safely be said that it has never been done yet and is never likely to be. In the nature of things, very few religious plays include even half of them, and hardly any contain the important element of intercession.

Secondly, one of the essentials of worship that must inevitably be left out is the offering of the will. In worship the Word of God is heard that may be done, and a necessary part of the offering of our whole selves to God is the offering of our resolve; but in drama this has no place, for the spectator is in a sense detached. When an audience attend a theatre (*theatron*, a place for viewing), their function is to behold (*theasthai*). They are not required in any full sense to take part in the action, but only to watch it. They may witness the representation of a crime, but they are not required to inform the police; they may see the representation of someone in danger, but they are not required to warn them. And the same is true of mental action as of physical; resolve is not required, and therefore it is not made. It would be possible, of course, for a play to be so constructed that the audience were addressed by one of the characters and invited to make some act of will; but if that were done, the audience would not be making a decision in their own persons but as actors in the play. They would not be John Jones, Peter Smith, and Mabel Evans; but "the crowd in the courtyard" or "the men of Bristol". Contemplating and resolving are not enemies—indeed one must contemplate before one can rightly resolve—but they cannot both take place at the same time. Resolving may follow the appreciation of a play, but it is not part of it. A play, therefore, may lead up to this supremely important element in worship, but it cannot include it within itself.

Thirdly, this takes us to the last great difficulty—the conflict between worship and impersonation. Impersonation is the fundamental distinguishing mark of drama. Karl Young, in *The Drama of the Mediaeval Church*, puts it very well:

A play . . . is above all else, a story presented in action, in which the speakers or actors impersonate the characters concerned. Dialogue is not essential, for a monologue is drama when the speaker impersonates the one from whom the utterance is represented as proceeding. Even spoken language may be dispensed with, for pantomime is a true, though limited, form of drama, provided a story is successfully conveyed, and provided the actors pretend to be the personages concerned in the story. As to the nature of impersonation in itself, there can scarcely be

any substantial disagreement. It consists in physical imitation. In some external and recognisable manner the actor must pretend to be the person whose words he is speaking, and whose actions he is imitating.

Now thoroughgoing impersonation is out of keeping with worship. In worship more than anywhere else we must be as completely ourselves as we can. We must, in our own character, mean what we say and do. We may put on vestments, express ourselves in ceremony, and use as much symbolism as we find serviceable; but we must not play at being someone we are not. The needs expressed must be our own needs, the desires uttered our own desires, the sins confessed our own sins. We put off all pretence and go to God as we are. Worship must be reality, not illusion. As W. L. Sperry says in his book *Reality and Worship*: "Drama demands that an actor play many roles, and depends upon the convention of an illusion accepted by both player and spectator. Things are not what they seem. Worship requires us to put off the playing of roles and to be ourselves. It has no interest in creating illusions."

It might seem at first as though this were only concerned with the worship of the actors, and not with that of the congregation; but that is not so. Anyone who is leading worship must himself be a worshipper; and if the worship of the actors is interfered with, that of the congregation will be also.

That an actor may impersonate a character and worship God at the same time can hardly be denied. He may be performing the actions and speaking the words of a Wise Man as he kneels before a china doll on stage, and yet be in very reality John Jones worshipping Christ in heaven. But although on such an occasion what he does and says as a stage character may express what he would do and say in his own person, the actual representation of an act of worship is at the most only a small part of any religious play, and in most religious plays is not present at all. In any other situation, the actor, if he is to be a true worshipper, must remain in some sense "outside" his part. He must not so identify himself with the character as to cease to be a Christian man now worshipping God; whatever his character says or does, there must go with it the reverence of a worshipper saying and doing these things in the very presence of God and for His glory. But that is not the method of successful drama.

In addition to these three great difficulties, there are various other matters which tend to limit the usefulness of drama as a part of the Church's services of worship—for example, the frequent necessity of portraying characters and actions which are out of keeping with the spirit of worship; the need for dramatic unity to take precedence over historical truth, and the disturbing fact that when the Christian faith is put into dramatic form, it can so often (like the ghost in *Hamlet* and the gods in *Sophocles*) be accepted as part of the machinery of the play without being believed in at all. There is no need to stress these problems here, because with care they can be satisfactorily solved; but the three great difficulties remain, and there is no way of perfectly overcoming them.

When we speak of Religious Drama as worship we should therefore be c

our guard lest we misinterpret its nature and even misapply its use. If we are thinking of worship in the broad sense, then Christian Drama, if it is made an offering to God, can be as much an act of worship as one's daily work, or, to give a more exact parallel, as giving or hearing a lesson on religious knowledge in a school. If we are thinking of worship in the more particular sense, we must recognise that we are talking very loosely. The performing or watching of a religious play is a mixed sort of occupation. It may indeed include some of the elements of worship (though it never includes them all); it may prepare us for that all-important part of worship which consists in the offering of the will (though that offering is not a part of the appreciation of the play, and indeed cannot take place so long as we maintain the aesthetic attitude of spectators who "behold"); and it may even embody acts of worship (though very few of them will adequately express real devotion, because they will be impersonations of someone else in his imaginary circumstances, and not the real acts of us in our actual circumstances). But it is mostly something other than worship, demands attitudes which contradict it, and often contains elements which are incompatible with it. It is no substitute for the worship of the Church, and cannot, except as a preface or an interlude, be incorporated into it.

Drama and Common Life

FRANCES GLENDENNING

During the last four years, a group of friends in the British S.C.M., staff and students, have spent part of their Easter and summer vacations rehearsing and touring religious drama, in many parts of Wales, in Lancashire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire.* Their work springs from a common conviction about the ministry of drama in the life of the Church, the Word being proclaimed through the medium of a particular art-form. They have set out with three great advantages: a house to live in, a church in which to worship, and in their repertory at least one great play.

The house for three years was a vicarage in Wales belonging to a member of the cast. The group became known as the Idris Players because they first met for rehearsals in the church of Tal-y-Llyn, on the slopes of Cader Idris, one of the most rugged of the Welsh mountains. This year the house was a vicarage on the edge of the Peak District, where the vicar and his family allowed themselves to be invaded by a group who littered the house with themselves, their half-finished costumes and other theatrical impedimenta.

During the four years of the group's existence about twelve people have belonged to it. Some now find it difficult to share in the work. One is on the staff of the Canadian S.C.M.; another is married; study, the professions and daily work claim the rest. However, a nucleus has remained from the

* In Holy Week, 1956, they will be touring churches in Hull and the East Riding.

start. The majority of the Idris Players have happened to be Anglican and so have been able to share in a daily Eucharist. From this common worship our work together has sprung.

This year we met for two days in January, for preliminary rehearsal and for one member to make his first acquaintance with the play. The play used in Holy Week has always been *The Way of the Cross*, by Henri Ghéon. Read in an armchair, it seems an adequate, although compressed account of the events of Holy Week traced out in fourteen short scenes following the pattern of the fourteen stations of the Cross. Acted out in a church with mime and music and silence, the play has the power to bring us to the foot of the Cross, saying:

You must choose between us or yourself,
Save us or save yourself,
You who would not save yourself, save us.
Nail us to the cross,
Nail the cross to us.

In the week before Holy Week we came together gradually. By midday Thursday, the first arrivals were well into a routine, and we were convinced that we could get on quite well without anyone else. But the evening brought another member, and then we could not remember what life had been like before she came. The next day our community grew by two, and again there was the feeling of completeness before they arrived, and yet immediately they came a realisation of how incomplete we had been without them. One more to come, one more adjustment to make—an adjustment which included peeling six extra potatoes to satisfy the persistent appetite of the stage manager. He came, heralding himself with his own particular cry, "Faint not nor fear, Williams is here". His name is not Williams, but it once appeared as such on a programme and has stuck.

We live and work according to a fairly strict time-table. The rehearsal week is harder than the week of performance, because we rehearse morning, afternoon and evening and have all our meals to prepare. Once the tour has begun, rehearsals are confined to adapting our movements and voices to the particular church in which we are playing, and also to enjoy the hospitality of that church for our evening meal.

The week of the tour, in which several hundred miles are covered, is still a time for discipline, nevertheless. The lighting equipment and simple properties are carried in two cars, in which seven people have to travel as well. Setting-up and striking set at the end of the evening result in a acknowledged team-work, with each person knowing precisely his or her job. No one can afford to be without some particular task, be it ironing the costumes, laying electric cable or focusing the "spots".

Because the group comes together for such short times during the year and because most of us are already well known to one another, some of the stresses and strains of community life remain hidden. In the first year of the group's life, tensions were most obvious during rehearsal, over

mime and interpretation. On the whole it was possible to arrive at a common mind, but occasionally we were relieved to accept the director's decision as final. Latterly the basic pattern of the play has been taken for granted, although each year new moves and new ideas are incorporated. Tensions are now more likely to be provoked by lack of concentration and by the presumption that after four years we know this play.

In good Religious Drama it is difficult to say which contributes more—the community to the play or the play itself to the life of the community. Certainly the whole life of this community revolves around the play: we work at nothing else and on the whole talk of nothing else. The play is a strong emotional and spiritual experience for an audience accustomed, perhaps, to milk and water romances with a Biblical flavour. A bishop said, after seeing a performance in Wales last year, “I don't know how you can do this night after night”. There is no answer to that except in our life and worship together.

It is difficult to meet members of the audience afterwards, particularly on nights when we have been acutely conscious of our own technical inadequacies, and when they have seen afresh the meaning of the Lord's suffering. Then we have to forget ourselves and see the play through their eyes and indeed through our own.

Our best performances have perhaps, not surprisingly, been on Good Fridays, but even then the most real and dramatic moment was not Christ before Pilate, not Christ meeting His Mother, nor Christ being nailed to the Cross, not even the joyful “He is risen”, but after the long slow exit through the back of the church, after the last reverberation of the triumphant music, the silence, the “Let us pray”, and then the audience on its knees turning the play into reality saying “Our Father”. That is the climax of the play and of our work together.

The New Pilgrim Players

D. LINNELL

The New Pilgrim Players closed down on March 4th! This somewhat startling statement may have come as a shock to many who have had first-hand experience of the work the New Pilgrims have been doing throughout the country during the last few years.

However, we do not intend to let them die as easily as that. The response to the work they have done in carrying the very highest standards in Religious Drama to the remotest places in the country has been too great, and we feel that their contribution to evangelism through drama is too important to let this be a final decision.

Since November last year the New Pilgrims, under the direction of Pamela Keily, whose sterling work has made this company what it is,

have given well over seventy performances in places as far apart as Lincolnshire and London, Cardiff and Cumberland. They have travelled the moors of Yorkshire and the streets of Birmingham in their bus, braving all kinds of wintry weather to put on shows in churches and halls. Many of these parishes could not be expected to find more than the basic £15 the New Pilgrims ask as a minimum towards their running costs of £120 a week, though a gallant few have given a good deal more than this. It is a pity that in many places the expenses were so high that the New Pilgrims did not get more than the basic fee and also that there were such delays in the making of payments. Difficulties such as these put an early end to the season. That is why new ways must be found of keeping the company alive.

The plays in their repertoire were varied this season. *Holy Family*, by R. H. Ward, came first—a well-trying and seasonable play which proved as equally popular in Lincoln prison as in the Cathedral. *Holy Family* was taken out and two other plays put into the repertoire in January of this year. These plays, *Showdown*, by Oliver Wilkinson, and *Murder Before God*, by Philip Turner, are both arresting essays in a new form of didactic drama, aiming to teach by awakening. *Showdown* has been seen before, but *Murder Before God* is a new play, and has proved very successful since it brings everyday life and language into the church buildings themselves and places man and his problems in their proper perspective before the very altar.

Should this work continue? Should the New Pilgrims be re-formed? We believe that they should and we would like to assure all the friends of the New Pilgrim Players that we will do everything within our power to raise the necessary capital to put the company on a firm footing for another season at a not too far-off date. The fact that many other people agree with this view is shown by the many letters and messages of appreciation we have received, and the many kindnesses done to the New Pilgrims on their tour.

Summer School of Religious Drama *August 13—22, 1956*

The Society is holding its annual residential nine-day School from August 13th to 22nd at King Alfred's College, Winchester.

This year the theme is Art and Theology and all sessions, whether lectures, rehearsals or discussions, will be planned in the light of this central theme. There will be groups for production and acting, for movement and music, and also a research group. This latter is something that we have not attempted before but should be of great value. It will look for quality in the Arts with periods devoted to painting and sculpture, poetry, drama and music, and their relationship to belief and worship.

Thus the whole School is designed to include all groups of students from beginners to those who have had considerable experience.

Winchester will be a popular choice for those wanting to combine this course with their holiday, for not only is it an old cathedral city with all the attractions this implies, but it is also the centre of beautiful country, and excursions can be arranged to the New Forest, Romsey Abbey and Salisbury Cathedral.

The fees are from eight guineas to fourteen guineas with special terms for students under thirty. Overseas students are most welcome.

As we anticipate a full School we advise our readers to book in good time. Application forms are now ready, and are obtainable from The Religious Drama Society of Great Britain, S.P.C.K. House, Northumberland Avenue, London, W.C.2.

Notes from the Back Pew

From Holy Week at Hallbury, by the Rev. R. T. Brooks, broadcast on Northern Children's Hour, Good Friday, 1955.

Mr. Matthews: "We've been talking for a long time about *our* Holy Week play, *our* Holy Week service, *our* Holy Week effort. But you know, that word 'holy' really means that it's not ours, but God's. It's God's word that we're taking upon our lips, His story we're telling. That makes a difference to the way we tell it. The story of the Cross is holy and beautiful beyond anything else in the world. And it belongs to everybody.

"That's why we're telling it. Not to please ourselves or show ourselves off, but as the servants of God's truth. The first thing required of each of us is to love that story so that we want to serve and spread it."

Ideas from Organisers.

The producer of a play for a Mission writes:

"Our audience was selected. Church members had been asked, by letter, to supply names and addresses of three neighbours likely to accept an invitation, and then either by hand or by post, over two thousand invitations were distributed. . . . Many of those who came were non-churchgoers."

An East Anglian vicar, announcing a production, said:

"As we particularly wanted to produce this fine play, the company organised a sale of work to raise the performing fee. . . ."

Few Religious Drama Groups do not have to contend with constant difficulties. Has your Group had a new idea for overcoming them? If so, will you write to CHRISTIAN DRAMA and share it?

Snapshots of 1955.

Some visual memories, serious and not so serious, of the past year. . . .

The lovely unseeing gaze of a fourteen-year-old Madonna, totally blind, in the Nativity play at a Manchester school.

The "modern dress" in *The Man Born to be King* at St. Thomas', Regent Street, the visual equivalent of Dorothy Sayers' dialogue: John's duffle coat, Matthew's regrettable yellow tie, Peter and Andrew in their fishermen's jerseys and sea-boots . . . the Christ in a white, open-necked shirt and grey trousers . . . so startlingly immediate, but still curiously timeless.

A crowd of dripping umbrellas round a cart, while people hung over the

balconies of the nearby flats, watching *Mann's End* down in Poplar; floor lights orange in the blue, wet dusk, and dialogue punctuated every now and then by sounds from the East India Docks.

And not so serious . . .

An otherwise dignified Angel, self-illuminated on the battery system, was kept flashing on and off like a Belisha beacon. . . .

Our Minnesota Herod, at the Summer School, stalking the lawns of Culham College magnificently, to the strains of three paper trumpets, one penny whistle and a tin can.

Our Patron Saint.

Shorthand-typists were recently given their own patron saint. It is high time that the Religious Drama movement chose a suitable patron. St. Genesius has been put forward (by students with happy memories of the Ripon Summer School); but why not St. Aldhelm?

St. Aldhelm was a Saxon Bishop of Sherborne, who was born in Canterbury (like the R.D.S.). Tradition relates that he grew tired of preaching to the converts in the Minster, while the crowds made merry down by the bridge. So he disguised himself as a minstrel and went down to the bridgehead. The people gathered to hear his popular songs and stories, and soon they were listening to the story of Christ, told in their own tongue and favourite style. Week after week he taught them in this way, and many converts joined him.

What wouldn't we give to be such "minstrels for God" to the Hydrogen Bomb and Television Age?

Footnote.—The reader of *The Times* Agony Column who suggests St. Judas as performer of the impossible, is perhaps a little pessimistic. . . .

Overheard at the Play.

Voice (horribly audible): "Well, the *scenery's* all right, isn't it?"

CAPELLA.

International Notes

The following notes have been supplied to us through the kindness of Dr. W. Gutkelch of Germany.

The German Evangelical Church Festival will be held this year at Frankfurt-am-Main from August 8th–12th in all German manifestations of Protestant Christianity. A number of plays will be given by different groups and the Evangelical Youth will present a great Choir Festival Play.

After the great successes gained by The Christian Stage Movement in Germany since 1945 with the plays of Rutenborn, Payot, Gutkelch and Wehner, a Legend Play by Manfred Hausmann is now reaching a record number of performances. The play deals with the nature of man in the light of Divine justice and mercy.

This year again the Festival of the Christian Theatre will be held in Berlin. Last year after the various plays had been performed these were ended with a discussion on the Church of the Theatre.

Vaganten-Bühne Berlin, Director Horst Behrend, recently opened its own house. During the inaugural ceremony representatives of the Evangelical Church expressed the Churches' gratitude for the missionary work which had been carried out by the Vaganten in Berlin since their formation.

n 1949. It is interesting to note that the Vaganten opened their new house with the performance of Shaw's *St. Joan*.

The Jochen-Klepper Foundation Silver Medal last year awarded to Christopher Fry was this year presented to Dr. Ingeborg Drewitz for her play *Alle Tore waren Bewacht*.

A Christian Theatre under the name of Die Tangente has been opened in the old University town of Goettingen. Plays by Hausmann and Camus have already been given. Fry's *Sleep of Prisoners* is among the plays planned for the future.

In Sweden Madame Harriet Hjorth of the Sigtuna Foundation writes:

A large-scale plan is being put into operation for the whole country; smaller groups are being formed under the personal supervision of our stage director, Tuve Nyström, and throughout Sweden special courses are being arranged through the Swedish Church, to introduce our ideas and train new leaders. Moreover, on March 5th, we give the first performance of a new production of *Prophet and Carpenter*, by Olov Hartman, in the Cathedral of Uppsala, in which Christian students from the University will take part. This production will go out to other towns immediately afterwards. The Prophet is played by a professional actor from our permanent company.

In May, we give the first performance of *Livets krona (Crown of Life)*, also by Olov Hartman, written for our Society. Also in May, our professional company, directed as always by Tuve Nyström, will present *Christ in the Concrete City* in the Royal Park in Stockholm.

TO OUR OVERSEAS FRIENDS, ESPECIALLY DELEGATES WHO TOOK PART IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AT OXFORD LAST JULY

Greetings to our friends—and may we thank the two delegates who have sent reports for inclusion in this number of CHRISTIAN DRAMA.

We are most disappointed that we have received only one order for copies of the International Conference number of CHRISTIAN DRAMA. May I remind you that while at Oxford you asked us to publish a considerable quantity of this magazine as you would all want to order it for your countries. We have only had one order! What has happened? Do please send us your orders without fail.

We hope that many of you will send us reports for the next number of this magazine. They must be received here not later than June 1st. May I ask that these articles be brief and written in fluent English.

We are now making arrangements for the International Committee consisting of six delegates who were elected at the Conference last July. We hope that the Committee will meet for a few days during this July. We will be glad to hear of any matters which you would like discussed at this Committee.

CARINA ROBINS.

"THE STRONG ARE LONELY"

("Sur la Terre comme au Ciel")

A Play by Fritz Hochwalder, tr. by Eva le Gallienne.

by B. M. JACKSON

When we repeat, Sunday by Sunday, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven", what do we really mean? What kind of Kingdom of God on earth are we praying for, and why?

This is the problem raised by "Sur la Terre comme au Ciel" (mysteriously renamed *The Strong are Lonely* in English, a title which has very little to do with the play's theme). It is not an easy problem, and the farther one probes into it, the more formidable it appears.

On the face of it, the issues at stake should be simple enough. The story, based on historical fact, presents a dramatic situation with a force, at once dry and passionate, that has held audiences in Paris and the West End in a rigid silence.

The action takes place in Buenos Aires, on a single day in 1767. The Jesuits have established an ideal Christian community among the Indians of Paraguay: no slavery, no profiteering, "all things common" under the benevolent despotism of the Society. "Everyone sings." Trade is booming. The converts flock in. Naturally, when their slaves desert and profits fall, the Spanish settlers cause trouble in Madrid, and the King's envoy opens the play with an enquiry into their allegations against the Father Provincial in charge. They are easily proved false—but the community breathes again too soon. The first blow falls. Spain, they learn, has already decided that the new State cannot be tolerated. Genuine or not, the Jesuits must go.

Defiance flares up in the College, which is soon in a state of siege, and a last ditch resistance seems inevitable when a second blow crushes the Father Provincial alone. An apparently unimportant traveller reveals himself as a legate from the Father General in Rome. He calls upon the Father Provincial's vow of obedience commanding him to submit to Spain (to save the whole Society of Jesus from suppression), and to give up the notion that the Church can ever safely meddle with the things of this world, even for good. Souls, not bodies, are the concern of a Christian order. The claims of his vows are too strong for the Father Provincial. After an agonising struggle, he gives way.

This violent personal crisis is all the more painful because he is forbidden to explain his change of attitude to his subordinates, who regard him as a traitor. Fighting breaks out in the courtyard between the Indians and the soldiers. The Father Provincial, in despair, rushes out to stop them, is struck by a bullet, and comes back to die; and as the curtain falls, the Spanish envoy inaugurates the new regime—with death sentences.

So far, so good. We have a clear case: corrupt Spain and sinister Rome have combined to destroy the innocent, the benevolent and the kind. Yes, but is it as straightforward as that? The Jesuits have a slight air of self-satisfaction—our work, *our* achievements (praise God, of course)—but excusably. One really begins to be uneasy when the Father Provincial casually remarks that of course they have an army for defence, with home-made ammunition. The irony of the envoy's "The Kingdom of God has become *quite* a power on the earth!" seems not unreasonable. *Can* Christians control the purse, and do without the sword?

Again, is the Roman legate entirely hypocritical? What happened to the Papacy when it took on political responsibilities? When monasteries in the Middle Ages started to accept worldly power, with the best of motives, they began to decline in spiritual force.

The most telling point, however, is made almost at the end of the play—too late, in fact, for its full weight to make itself felt. The Father Provincial calls in two Indian chiefs who that morning had asked for baptism. Why do they want

him to baptise them? They want the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bishop will baptise them. . . . No, the Bishop's Christ is not so good as the Jesuits'. What can the 'Jesuits' Christ give them? The Indians answer, "Food . . . clothes . . . security. . . ." and the Father Provincial realises that in the name of a crucified Saviour he has been building a community of what missionaries call "rice-Christians." It is in the shock of this discovery that he goes to his death.

Good drama? Yes: the play is well constructed, and generates more excitement over the clash of ideas than one would have thought possible—all the more so as the protagonists are barely two-dimensional. We know no more about them than the plot demands. Relevant to the times? Recent events, in South Africa for instance, suggest that it may be. Relevant to you and me? It is difficult to suppress a sigh on reading that yet another play "offers no solution to the problems it raises"; but a play has not failed to influence thoughtful Christians if, as "Sur la Terre comme au Ciel" has done, it sends them back to the Gospels, to think over the sayings about the Kingdom with a new urgency.

The play was produced for a short tour, and for four weeks at the Piccadilly Theatre in November and December 1955; with powerful performances by Donald Wolfit as the Father Provincial, by Robert Harris and Ernest Milton. As we go to press, it is running at the Haymarket Theatre.

The FLORENCE MOORE THEATRE STUDIOS

Local Centre for the Guildhall School
of Music and Drama—London

Under the patronage of

DONALD WOLFIT, C.B.E.; ABRAHAM
SOFAER; MARGARET HALSTAN; JACK
LYNN (of the Pasadena Playhouse
U.S.A.)

gives comprehensive training in

THEATRE EDUCATION

Verse and Playwriting encouraged

FULL AND PART-TIME COURSES

Two Male Scholarships available



Application for auditions to the

**Secretary, 25 Brunswick Rd.,
Hove 2, Sussex**

Tel. Hove 3358

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 11 a.m. on Friday, November 18, 1955, at the Horseshoe Hotel, Tottenham Court Road.

The Rt. Rev. the Lord Bishop of Chichester was in the chair. The meeting was opened with prayer led by the Chairman.

The Bishop of Chichester welcomed the large gathering of members and expressed the hope that there would be useful and lively discussion on various points raised in the reports to be given.

1. The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on November 18, 1954 were confirmed.

2. The following apologies were received:

Miss Murray Andrews, Dame Dorothy Brock, D.B.E., Mrs. G. Browett, Miss Diana M. Budd, R. Burnell, Esq., Mrs. Chapman, Geoffrey Clarke, Esq., H. Rowntree Clifford, Esq., Miss M. Cobby, the Rev. F. P. Copland Simmons, the Rev. F. N. Davey, Miss Josephine Dodds, C. le Fleming, Esq., the Rev. Frank Glendenning, Mrs. S. Hurst Greaves, Miss Evelyn Hart, Miss Creagh Henry, Dr. Alan Kay, Miss Janet Lacey, Mrs. D. F. B. Maitland, Miss Dorothy Marten, the Rev. P. MacLaughlan, Mrs. B. McCulloch, Miss Elizabeth Moore, Mrs. O'Hanlon, Mrs. Nora Ratcliff, Miss A. Seyler, Robert Speaight, Esq., the Rev. R. V. Spivey, the Rev. Donald Thomas, Brigadier G. P. Thomas, O.B.E., the Rev. O. Victor, C.R.

3. Election of Councillors: The following were elected for a term of four years:

Mrs. K. M. Baxter, Mrs. E. Heward Bowyer, Mrs. A. R. Bielby, Mrs. G. T. Browett, Alfred Brown, Esq., the Rev. P. Bullock Flint, Miss Freda Collins, the Rev. A. E. Cordell, the Rev. J. L. R. Crawley, Miss C. Deverill, the Viscount Duncannon, the Rev. F. V. Boyse, Christopher Ede, Esq., the Rev. Canon Gordon Hewitt, Miss F. Mackenzie, Mrs. A. Pattison-Muir, Laurence Peat, Esq., Miss Ruth Pitter, Mrs. B. Pritchard, Mrs. N. Ratcliff, Miss M. Stanley-Wrench, the Rev. Cyril Thomas, Miss O. M. Willis.

4. Welcome by the Chairman of the Executive:

Mr. Martin Browne: May I first say what a pleasure it is to see such a good number of members present at the Annual General Meeting? We seem to have a good representation from different parts of the country.

Secondly, may I say what a great pleasure it is to us all to have our President in the chair at the Annual General Meeting? This follows his presiding over almost all the sessions of the International Conference, which was the main task of this year and the results of which we shall begin to hear of in Miss Ford's report. About the Conference I should like to say a word or two, though the report of it *in extenso* will be published in the forthcoming number of CHRISTIAN DRAMA. It was an extremely interesting Conference, held at Oxford for five days at Lincoln College, the first Conference of its kind ever held in the world. It is a great honour and pleasure to this Society that owing to the generosity of the Rockefeller Foundation, it was made possible for us to arrange this Conference of fifty delegates representing fifteen countries in Europe and North America, a valuable and stimulating chance of meeting and personal contacts with an extraordinary sense of intimate fellowship—Roman Catholics and Protestants with considerable differences of background got to know one another and to make real friendship and to feel that there could be a field for visits and correspondence and that we should be regularly enriching one another. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Bishop and also to the two who gave to the subject months of time and thought—Carina Robins and Ursula Nicholl.

When we discussed with the Rockefeller Foundation the possibilities of exchange, we suggested that following this Conference we should investigate and report on the actual work that is going on in Religious Drama in Europe. The Foundation provided money for an officer, whom we have called the European Travelling Adviser. She is here today—Miss Joan Ford.

I am not going, of course, to give detailed reports on all departments, but only to mention them. The training work, controlled by the Travelling Adviser, is developing very rapidly. The Summer School is always a highlight of the year's work and has developed character. There have been numerous short courses, sometimes initiated by the Society, sometimes asked for by local bodies. Membership is moving very slightly—but in the right direction. This is something to be proud of. The membership is still far too small for a Society with international influence. I hope that we shall be very frank about this. One of the snags that crop up in discussion of the work of this Society is that people are interested in local work and do not feel there is anything to be gained from membership of a national body. Yet, if the Society is to become a body of world-wide influence it must have a firm base in this country where the work has been done. We are the senior Advisory Religious Drama organisation of the world. We can spend today in finding one or two ways to show and convince people that this is something which is a tool valuable enough to the Church in the world to be worth their supporting it—not just something useful to draw on for local work.

There is another thing which we can only by chance do anything about—office accommodation. We are now housed with S.P.C.K. whose generous help, alone, has enabled us to continue our existence. But S.P.C.K. is moving. The problem within the next year *or less* is to find alternative accommodation. This is extraordinarily difficult. It must be in Central London and be accessible. Suggestions, please.

The accounts are to be presented to the Council this afternoon and I hope all members will stay to the Council meeting to hear them. This year we are £40 down. The Society's activities have been increased, thanks to S.P.C.K., but we are still living on much too narrow a margin. There are a great many things we can do to expand usefulness but we are bound by our financial limitations. We can't do any more now. *We must have more members.*

We shall hear about the New Pilgrim Players from Miss Keily. They have reassembled, after a very long summer break, to do *Holy Family*. They have recurring problems. They attempt to do their work in a simple way; they work in churches, halls, etc., with adequate professional standard. They are a very young company and they try to set a standard for amateur groups. They should recruit people with an adequate amount of talent, but there is the financial problem—the company can never pay its way. We ask a £15 guarantee for each performance, but even if all guarantees are paid they do not pay for rehearsal period. And some guarantees are not paid. There is now a struggle to find substantial help. Pilgrim Players Ltd. decided to continue this autumn only because of the contributions given at the Summer School. Even so the margin is too narrow—no more than £100 in the bank. Pilgrim Players Ltd. thought they could start the autumn season but not take the responsibility of continuing the work beyond March unless a regular source of income is forthcoming. The situation is very difficult.

A word or two about the officers of the Society. It is a great sorrow to us all that Col. Grant has had to resign his positions. He has been with the Society from the very beginning. He has often presided over the Executive—has been from the very beginning on the Board and has contributed an immense amount of help, knowledge, advice, wisdom, contacts to the growth of the Society. Now he has been ill for some time. He was in hospital in Oxford during the International Conference. Some of us were able to see him and tell him about the Conference during that time. He is living now with friends a few miles from Oxford. He has written and said that he must resign his positions, with great regret. The Executive propose that he should be a Vice-President.

Miss Athene Seyler cannot be with us today—she does not think she should be Chairman of Council—she cannot give enough time to keep in touch with the Society, now that her play is rehearsing for another change of cast and she is so busy. The only effective officers can be those who know what is going on. We must, of course, accept her resignation, but she has brought us something special to herself. She is one of the few Christians at the very head of the theatrical profession who are really interested in what we are doing. We could do with many more. We owe her a great debt of gratitude. She is also surely the only person of such eminence in her profession who also produces parish plays in her own parish. The Executive nominate her as a Vice-President.

Lawrence Peat has left us to study for ordination. Though he began as a member of the Company he became Advance Manager for the New Pilgrim Players and did some sterling work in that job. Then he took on the position of organiser for the Society in the North of England. We owe him thanks for a great amount of splendid work. We must now find someone to succeed him. There is a big field in the North of England. Headquarters is in London and people far away do belong to regional organisations, leading an independent life and contributing to the whole pattern. We are fortunate in getting Mr. Linnell here today—he has been with us a short time for the Pilgrim Players. Miss Ursula Nicholl began as Southern Area Organiser in May and we look forward to the results of the work of which she has been laying the foundations in the last few months. A word of thanks, too, to members of the Executive who have given many and varied services costing time and thought outside meetings.

In a way, the way in which the Society is run is a curious one. We have a Council which meets only once a year for an annual meeting. The main work is done by the Executive which meets every other month; its twenty members are elected by the Council. The results of its work are brought to this Conference on one day of the year. Should we review things and get an Executive body which could get the help of people from farther afield who were members of it rather than a body which is simply an extension of the annual meeting? If you want to consider doing anything about that, we can't, of course, do it here but must pass it back to the Executive for consideration.

Finally, I want to pay tribute to the work of the Secretary, who is the foundation on which the whole of the Executive work is based.

Bishop of Chichester: We have just had a most interesting report from the Chairman which shows the Society's range of influence. There are a number of points that the Annual General Meeting might take up. If so, I hope people will rise quickly and start. Of course, some know better than others what we owe to Mr. Martin Browne and Mr. Hogben. But I do hope we shall have some valuable and stimulating talk.

Miss Collins: I am interested that Mr. Martin Browne wants to review the organisation of the Society. It is an excellent plan that we should get more help from country members.

Fr. Cordell: We are not getting enough people and won't get them with a high subscription. There are plenty of young people under thirty or under twenty-one who can't possibly pay 30s. or 21s. a year.

Mrs. Martin Browne thought that church collections might be taken for the Religious Drama Society and that in such a way the parish could join as a whole.

Bishop of Chichester: A practical way of publicising R.D.S. among parishes is in parish magazines. Before or after a play has been given some account of the play could be put in or something about R.D.S., and the way in which it works somewhere in the insets of magazines.

Mrs. Martin Browne: CHRISTIAN DRAMA might be of interest to parishes.

Mrs. Boulton proposed the giving of talks at Ruridecanal meetings.

Miss Mary Paull thought R.D.S. worth supporting for its own sake.

Bishop of Chichester: That is the point. We are the senior Society for Religious Drama with influence all over Europe and the U.S.A. and some of the Dominions

And yet it is difficult to get interest in our own dioceses. It is the personal approach more than literature which gets people interested. We have organisers. R.D.S. has problems and financial difficulties, but it can look with pride at the way in which it has gone forward. The influence of the Society is quite out of proportion to its membership. We *must* try to get more members.

Mr. Atfield: It is difficult to get groups in the North into touch with R.D.S. Headquarters based in London. We have tried (in Liverpool) to get groups to be affiliated. And as soon as we tried to get them to affiliate through local diocesan bodies they succeeded in getting their interest. But when the subscription was raised and doubled they found it impossible. It was possible to get 10s. 6d. but not £1 1s. from people from Lancashire parishes and groups. Our people are not sufficiently experienced to understand and get their full value from R.D.S. They would rather work from and through a local centre. Groups near London can do it but Lancashire people can't. A concession should be made to country members. There should be a country subscription.

Mr. Fletcher Campbell: I must emphasise that the work of R.D.S. is a tremendous power of evangelism in England. This is how we want to present it. So we ask you to pay a guinea. Dioceses do use Religious Drama for evangelistic campaigns. It is an Act of Witness and evangelism. People support S.P.G., C.M.S., etc., and parishes do so because they feel these societies are doing valuable work. We are not here to help little groups to present bigger and better Nativity plays and Easter plays. People would get the wrong idea if we were to give country concessions. R.D.S. is a vitally integral part of the work of the Church. But people don't believe that and so membership doesn't increase.

A member: Have we many schools interested? Schools more than any other groups are doing Religious Drama but don't know about the work of the Society.

Mr. Hogben: The number is far too small but we have some—I don't know the exact number.

Mrs. Baxter: Few people see at all where we tie in with the real evangelistic drive of the Church. We must go into completely new fields. Only in this way are we going to get the new membership we need for the Society to continue, and make the Gospel come alive to those who need it most.

Miss Hart: I sympathise with the last speaker and with Mr. Fletcher Campbell. Religious Drama is a tool for preaching the Gospel.

Members thought County Drama Festivals should raise interest, since through them a new world of recognition was opening up.

Miss Hewlett: Young people have given religious plays in our mill. It was very interesting. They were absolute pagans—we had to explain almost every word to them. Reading the Branch reports—it seems that progress has been hampered by the subscription. Bradford Branch members go out and do real propaganda work among young people. To give a play is only a small thing, though.

. Report by Miss C. Robins (Travelling Adviser):

Branches: The six branches in the British Isles are Bradford, Durham, Huddersfield, Leeds, South Wales and Sussex. Durham County is the new branch and very much alive. It organised a most successful week-end School at Lambton Castle in co-operation with the Durham County Education Committee at which Miss Nicholl and myself were tutors. As a result of this week-end twelve people came to our Summer School at Abingdon.

After a good week-end Course at Swansea, plans have been made for the South Wales Branch to divide into two, with centres at Cardiff and at Swansea.

Leeds Branch is having a difficult time but we hope it will weather the storm.

Summer School, August 22-31: Culham College, Abingdon, proved an ideal situation for this summer and full advantage was taken of the fine weather. All rehearsals took place in the grounds, music played an important part, and there was a free exchange of resources between the groups.

Training: Largely thanks to the work of Mr. Laurence Peat we had a great increase in the number of short courses, for instance, last year two week-ends

and a course in Holland, this year nine week-ends or one-day courses in addition to the Summer School and International Conference.

Productions: I had the privilege of producing *Thor, with Angels*, by Christopher Fry, for the Community of the Resurrection Commemoration Day in the Quarry Theatre at Mirfield, Yorks, before an audience of three thousand in July. My cast was drawn from Leeds University students.

In November I directed a production of *Gates of Hell*, by Joyce Biddell, for the Redhill and Reigate Council of Churches in Redhill Town Hall.

Amongst a list of lectures and meetings I might mention the Carlisle Diocesan Conference which I addressed in November.

Miss Ursula Nicholl: Miss Nicholl gave us valuable assistance in the organising of the International Conference in Oxford in July, and she has spoken at a number of meetings and tutored short courses. She has started her second season of Monday evenings with the Southwark Cathedral Drama Group and also acting as advance agent to our Company for its London and South Wales tours.

The Bishop of Chichester called for discussion of Miss Robins' report.

Mr. Collett asked people to come to Miss Robins' production of Joyce Biddell's play *Gates of Hell* at Redhill.

6. Report by Miss B. Jackson (Librarian):

During the year 1954-55 a total of 1,155 packets, including 265 sets, were sent out from the library. The stock has been increased by the addition of forty-four new titles, and several sets for reading or production have been added.

The library deals with a large number of letters weekly, the peak periods being September and October, when members are choosing their Christmas plays, and February, when they are deciding on a Passion play in time for Lent. The majority of letters are requests for specific plays, or for advice in selecting a play for a particular occasion. Though the library correspondence is never a matter of routine, sometimes unusual and fascinating questions have to be answered. Last Easter, for example, we were asked to trace a recording of an angry crowd shouting for "Barabbas!" (we did find one in the end); at Christmas a producer wanted to know what myrrh looks like; and recently the Librarian spent an agreeable lunch hour in the National Gallery, finding out what the well-dressed Angel was wearing in 1425.

Members continue to hire sets for production, and we believe that this serves a useful purpose. Most groups take excellent care of the books in their charge but there have been a few cases of sets returned covered in Biro or heavy pencil markings. We cannot afford to replace books on the municipal library scale and must appeal to groups to remember this, however great the temptation to write down the producer's comments on a handy page.

This year has seen the publication of two play-lists in pamphlet form. "Plays for Passiontide and Easter" was issued in February, and "Plays for Christmas and Epiphany" in June. These are intended to bring the relevant sections of the 1951 Catalogue up-to-date, and to be a more flexible way of distributing information. They have been well received, especially the Christmas list, and reprinting may soon be necessary.

Bookstalls have been provided for eighteen conferences and schools this year. These included a special display for the thirteenth Centenary Celebrations at Peterborough, in co-operation with the S.P.C.K., with whom we continue to have good relations. The bookstall and display at the "Church speaks to Cardiff" week in November was organised with Mr. Peat's help, and showed costumes for *Murder in the Cathedral* lent by the Old Vic Theatre Wardrobe.

The bookstall at the Summer School at Abingdon was well frequented by the students. The sales amounted to a record total of over £80.

We were very grateful for the work of Miss Bainbridge-Bell as Librarian in charge at the International Conference. As a result of the Conference, delegates have begun to send their plays and magazines to the library. A special Overseas Section has begun, so far containing publications in French, German, Flemish, Dutch, Swedish and Danish. Earlier in the year the library became affiliated to

the Theatre Libraries section of the International Federation of Library Associations, and we hope that this may help to strengthen our links with other European countries.

Mr. Hogben pointed out that although the library was one of the Society's services and use of it is included in the membership fee country members used it far more than London members.

Mr. Martin Browne: Can we hear something about the reading of new scripts? The bulk of the scripts are written from an exclusively Christian point of view which will only make impact on people who are already interested. It is hard to get plays which can make a real impact on people who are already interested. It is hard to get plays which can make a real impact and present the Christian faith to everyone.

Miss P. Keily (Director of the New Pilgrim Players) spoke briefly on the work of the company.

A questioner asked: Do the Pilgrims ask permission to perform their plays or do they wait till they are invited to a particular place?

Miss Keily and Mr. Linnell: We occasionally get enquiries but most of the work is to approach and say that we want to come—can they help us? One of the difficulties is to get enough bookings in the same place, within reach of each other, or of the same centre.

The Bishop asked about the guarantee asked for each performance.

Mr. Linnell: Most people make £15 and give it to us, but some don't. One of our bookings this season says he'll easily make more and give it to us. I hope it may be possible later to raise the minimum guarantee.

The Bishop suggested that a "Christian solicitor's" letter be sent to churches who have not paid for performances weeks or months ago.

Mr. Hogben: This is a disappointing aspect of the New Pilgrims—only once as more than the guarantee arrived in payment for a performance. Some churches have not yet paid for performances seven or eight months ago. A "Christian solicitor's" letter has not yet produced the money.

The question of a publicity agent was raised and it was hoped that the publicity side of the New Pilgrim Players might be developed.

Miss Alder: How far is the work of the Pilgrims educational for groups making experiments themselves?

Miss Keily: In many ways the Pilgrims are almost like an amateur group themselves. They are a very young company and play as professionals, though with the salary we can give we cannot hope to get experienced professionals. They do not play in theatres but often to people interested in amateur dramatics.

The Bishop: I think the Pilgrim Players are one of the most important aspects of the Society's work. It is a shame when people who ask the Pilgrims to come don't pay.

Miss Keily: Of course this kind of acting has an effect on the actors themselves. It makes a difference whether they are Christians or not. And there is difficulty in getting the right plays.

Miss Robins: They are a demonstration and example to groups of amateurs. And there is the evangelistic side of it.

Miss Nicholl: A vicar told me that the impression one performance by the New Pilgrim Players made was the same as that which followed a successful mission.

The Bishop: Sometimes lay people can make more impression than ordained ministers. The more the laity are made to do things (and audiences will respond to things done by lay people), the more lasting will be the impression. The work of the Pilgrim Players, a creative venture done by young people—performing plays with something of real value in them—is most important.

Mrs. Pattison Muir: I understand that a hundred groups of prayer-circles were formed and prayed for the success of Billy Graham's mission. It is up to us to pray and to form our own groups for the New Pilgrim Players.

The meeting adjourned for lunch.

The meeting resumed after lunch when Mr. Martin Browne announced that the Bishop, who had had to leave at that point, had generously promised a donation of £100 to the New Pilgrim Players, whose running costs were at least £1,000 a year.

Miss Willis offered an equal sum, an offer received with gratitude by Mr. Martin Browne.

The members then heard Miss Ford's report which follows almost in full.

8. Report by the European Travelling Adviser (Miss J. Ford):

Report on Religious Drama in Scandinavia and Finland. Miss Joan Ford who had returned only the previous day, apologised for the fact that her report would probably be sketchy and out of proportion, since the Danish people had spent the last four days in ensuring that her last impressions of Religious Drama in Denmark were as vivid and varied as possible. Their success in this she said, meant that her impressions of the other countries were temporarily a bit overlaid. Miss Ford continued: I will try to focus the main points by taking together Norway and Finland, which have similar difficulties with regard to the presentation of plays in a church context, and Denmark and Sweden, where these difficulties do not arise, or only to a minor extent.

To deal first with the professional theatre, which of course comes within the scope of the survey in which I am engaged. Briefly, one may say that most of the plays with a Christian basis which have been successful on the public stages in recent years in Western Europe and America have been translated and used in one or more of the theatres of Scandinavia and Finland. I found *L'Alouette* being rehearsed in Tampere (the chief industrial town of Finland), and *The Day is Light Enough* repeating in Aarhus the success it had earlier this year in Copenhagen. Everyone in Sweden was talking about *The Living-Room*, and *Partage de Midi* was the success of last season in the Town Theatre in Gothenburg. Besides this, the Scandinavian writers Kaj Munk, Ibsen and Strindberg are popular in all four countries, and many people drew my attention to the religious context of Strindberg's last plays and of many of Ibsen's. There are also living writers in each country writing plays on Christian themes for the professional stage, and an international competition among the four countries held recently produced a number of plays of this kind.

Turning to the question of Church drama in Norway and Finland, we find that in both countries the Lutheran National church is "pietist"—i.e. more or less what we call puritanical—and the very words drama and theatre still smack of evil and worldliness to most devout members of these churches. Consequently in Norway as far as I could discover, there is no dramatic activity directly connected with the Church, no plays in churches or church halls, and no Christmas or Bible plays in Sunday schools, not even as a method of teaching. Permission was refused for the students from Aarhus in Denmark to give their production of *Murder in the Cathedral* in a church building in Oslo.

There are two brighter spots in this scene, rather a gloomy one from our point of view; one is that the Institute for Christian Education encourages the acting of plays as a means of teaching the Bible to children in the primary schools, and the other is the play of St. Olaf, the national hero, which has been performed for the last two years in the ruins of a church in Stiklestad, on the scene and anniversary of his martyrdom. This play is organised by the municipality without opposition from the Church, and it is hoped that it will become an annual event.

In Finland the situation is similar, at least in the country places, but in the towns, notably Helsinki and Turku-Abo, conservatism is not so strong, and church plays have been performed both in the Swedish church in Helsinki and in youth groups of the Finnish Lutheran church. I met one pastor who has been putting on shows, part pageant, part play, part mime, with the members of his youth club for the past fifteen years, and has helped other groups to do the same. The plays are devised by the members of the youth club (it is a large one with about four hundred members) as part of the process of discussing the

problem with him and with each other, and they are frankly and successfully evangelistic.

Finland is a country with a very large and very active amateur drama movement, but as far as I could discover religion only comes rarely and by chance into the repertoire. The professional theatre is very serious-minded, however—theatre in Finland is culture, never mere entertainment—and religious themes are rather well represented on the public stage in the larger towns. This is also true of all but two of the theatres in Oslo, and of the theatres of Bergen, Stavanger and Trondhjem in Norway, and this fact tends to redress a little the absence of religious Drama within the Church, in both countries.

In Sweden and Denmark church plays (which for the most part are actually performed in churches, or in the open air in summer) are much more usual, and are accepted by a much larger proportion of the Church people as normal. Common to the two countries is a rather deep division of opinion about the function of such plays, which looks at first sight like the opposition between "highbrow" and "lowbrow", between those who aim at the highest possible level both in the literary quality of the plays done and in the technique of production and acting, and those who are concerned first with evangelism and perhaps also with acting for fun and as a means of educating those who take part. In fact the opposition is more probably that between two different attitudes to what happens in church at a normal service—two attitudes which may be roughly characterised as the liturgical approach and the preaching approach. In plays of the first school, of which Olov Hartman's are the most characteristic, the attempt is made to involve everybody present in an act of worship focussed upon the presence of God symbolised by the altar. The plays of the second school, and typically those presented by Pastor Helweg in the Church of the Holy Ghost in the centre of Copenhagen from 1947 to 1953, are based on the preaching-service of the Danish Church, beginning with hymns and including reading from Scripture, with the acting either taking the place of the sermon or interrupting it (but it should be made clear that the plays took place on week-day evenings and were not the normal Sunday service nor a substitute for it). The chief aim of this school of thought is direct evangelism, and the plays certainly seem to have drawn many people from outside the usual church-goers to see them.

Most of the Danish plays have been acted by members of the church or local group involved, but in Sweden there is one amateur group who travel almost every week-end to present Bible plays in towns and villages all over Sweden. Their headquarters is in Stockholm, the director is Pastor Eric Arbin and the producer is Herman Greid. This group has been playing for ten years now, and was recently recognised by the Government, which accorded them a grant in aid of their work.

The Y.M.C.A. in Copenhagen has recently been experimenting with extempore plays, performed by young people of the 18–25 age group. The club discusses a topic of current interest which is of concern to young people, and if it proves to have dramatic possibilities they appoint a day when they will act it publicly. A few rehearsals are held to arrange exits and entrances, but the actual words which are to be spoken are not discussed or written down beforehand. The public performance is followed by a general discussion, in order that the audience and players may together reach a solution to the problem put by the half-hour of extempore playing.

Everywhere the shortage of good Christian plays was lamented, and I was often asked if the Society could help to increase the total of those available. In general there was great interest in the work of R.D.S. and in what is being done in this country. There seem to be a few, but not many, Scandinavian plays besides those which have already been translated which might be useful in other countries. It is remarkable how certain themes tend to recur, as a kind of local possession of the folk-imagination; in northern Scandinavia the dominant theme seems to be salvation, in the acute form presented, often visibly, by heaven's gate and the admittance or rejection of a particular person; in Denmark there

seems to be a preoccupation with traitors and notable sinners, like Pilate and Judas, and their motives and how they come to fall; while the Finns are still quite understandably fascinated by the miracle of their national deliverance, survival and independence.

In discussion afterwards Miss Oxenford mentioned the name of Mr. Raphael Mackay as being interested and knowledgeable about international youth drama; and Miss Ford, in response to a question from Miss Graham-Campbell, said that she had found very few plays suitable for translation, and many enquiries about English plays for use in the countries visited.

9. Miss Sykes of Huddersfield Branch read the resolutions proposed by the Huddersfield Branch:

- (i) "That there should be a junior membership fee of 5s. per annum for individual members under twenty-one years of age which will entitle them to receive CHRISTIAN DRAMA and other services of the Society."
- (ii) "That renewed consideration be given to the question of a lower annual subscription for individual members than that for groups, perhaps on the basis of half the group rate."

After detailed discussion Mr. Martin Browne asked: "Can we vote on passing this to the Executive in the form 'That this meeting urges the Executive to consider the institution of a junior membership fee for individual members under twenty-one, which would entitle them to receive CHRISTIAN DRAMA and other services of the Society'?"

This was passed *nem. con.* and after a further discussion on part (ii) of the Huddersfield resolution, in which Miss Robins said that the strength of the Branch was that each Branch member must pay through the Branch but was in direct touch with the national body, Mr. Martin Browne asked for a vote on resolution (ii), that the Executive be asked to consider it, and with it the whole problem of the relation of privileges to rates, the basic desire being to associate as many people as possible to the Society.

It was agreed that this whole matter should be passed to the Executive.

10. Any other business.

- (i) Miss Deverill asked that more information should be circulated about nominations for sub-committees, and that the information should not be limited to notes in CHRISTIAN DRAMA.

The Annual General Meeting closed at 3.15 p.m.

The Minutes of the Council

Mr. Duce in the Chair.

1. Minutes of the meeting of November 18, 1955.
2. The following apologies were received:

Miss Murray Andrews, Dame Dorothy Brock, D.B.E., Mrs. G. Browne, H. Rowntree Clifford, Esq., the Rev. F. P. Copland Simmons, the Rev. F. Davey, Miss Josephine Dodds, C. le Fleming, Esq., the Rev. Frank Glendennin, Miss Evelyn Hart, Dr. Alan Kay, Miss Janet Lacey, Miss Dorothy Marten, the Rev. P. MacLaughlan, Mrs. Nora Ratcliff, Miss A. Seyler, Robert Speaight, Esq., the Rev. R. Spivey.

Elections:

Mr. Martin Browne: Mrs. Baxter and I have talked over the future conduct of affairs during the forthcoming year. I am going to America for some months and in any case it seems to me that this is a good moment for someone else to take over the conduct of the Executive Committee, someone who is more in touch with the daily work of the Society. Therefore I suggested that Mrs. Baxter should take over the Chair of the Executive if the Executive agreed to that. That is why I am now standing for Chairmanship of the Council, not the Executive.

Mr. Duce said they were all grateful to have had Mr. Martin Browne in the Executive Chair.

The following were elected:

(a) *Council Chairman*: E. Martin Browne, Esq., C.B.E.

(b) *Council Vice-Chairman*: The Rev. R. Duce.

(c) *Hon. Treasurer*: J. H. L. Trustram, Esq.

(d) *Executive Committee*:

Mrs. K. M. Baxter, the Rev. F. V. Boyse, Alfred Brown, Esq., E. Martin Browne, Esq., C.B.E., H. Rowntree Clifford, Esq., Miss F. Collins, the Rev. A. E. Cordell, the Rev. R. Duce, the Rev. P. Bullock Flint, Charles Landstone, Esq., C. le Fleming, Esq., H. Malden, Esq., Miss Lyn Oxenford, Miss S. M. Pearce, Miss Henzie Raeburn, Cyril Swinson, Esq., Robert Speaight, Esq.

(e) *Patron*: His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury.

(f) *President*: The Lord Bishop of Chichester.

(g) *Vice-Presidents*:

The President of the Baptist Union

Dame Dorothy Brock, D.B.E.

The Rt. Rev. F. A. Cockin, Lord Bishop of Bristol

The President of the Congregational Union of England and Wales

T. S. Eliot, Esq., O.M.

The Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council

Christopher Fry, Esq.

Lt.-Col. R. C. Grant, D.S.O.

The Rt. Rev. L. S. Hunter, Lord Bishop of Sheffield

Sir Barry Jackson

The Rt. Hon. Lord Luke, T.D., D.L.

The President of the Methodist Conference

Nugent Monck, Esq., O.B.E.

George Odey, Esq., O.B.E., M.P.

The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of England

The British Commissioner of the Salvation Army

Miss Dorothy L. Sayers, D.Litt.

Miss Athene Seyler

Dr. Martin Shaw, O.B.E., Mus.D.

Robert Speaight, Esq.

Dame Sybil Thorndike, D.B.E.

Miss E. Younghusband.

(h) *Sub-Committees*:

Play-reading and Publications

and Library

R. Baldwin, Esq.

Miss E. Browett

The Rev. F. N. Davey

The Rev. R. Duce

Miss S. M. Pearce

Miss J. Powell

Miss H. Raeburn

Conferences and Schools

A. J. Clarke, Esq.

H. Rowntree Clifford, Esq.

Miss F. Collins

The Rev. P. Bullock Flint

The Rev. A. Cordell

Miss L. Oxenford

Miss S. M. Pearce

4. Appointment of Auditors:

Mr. Trustram: When we look at the balance sheet for this year we see a wonderful work done by the auditors. I think we must agree Messrs. D. M. Vaughan & Co. should be re-appointed auditors for the coming year.

This was carried *nem con.*

Mr. Duce thanked the auditors for their work in the past year.

5. Consideration of the Society's balance-sheet and accounts for the year ended June 30, 1955.

Mr. Trustram: It has been quite a satisfactory year, although unfortunately we have ended up with a loss of about £40. However, I would feel a great deal more guilty to stand before you and say we had made a profit. There is no need to go into details, but we are just about all right. Subscriptions have increased very slightly. There are not very many new members. There is a wastage. Therefore it is important that we should get a much greater number of members and a large subscription income. We have a grant from S.P.C.K. and we are very grateful. They give us £1,750, which goes as a contribution towards salaries. £100 of Rockefeller money was towards office expenses. We must thank Mr. Hogben for all his effort in securing help from the Rockefeller Foundation. But the Rockefeller Foundation as a source of income will not be a recurring one, although we have a further amount which can be allocated for next year; there is no certainty that it will be permanently continued, although there are some hopes that we shall get a definitely continuing *interest* from America.

There are no other principal items to be referred to on the income and expenditure account.

On the balance sheet—we still have Rockefeller money left, but since then we have had to pay for the International Conference and for the work of our "missionary" in Europe. By the time Miss Ford has finished the money will be used up.

Of course this account does not contain any reference to moneys or work of Pilgrim Players Ltd. These accounts are quite separate and the situation is not referred to in these accounts.

Mr. Duce: Will anyone propose the adoption of this report?

Mr. Martin Browne proposed its adoption and paid tribute to the work of the Treasurer. He said that this year, as many years past, he had done faithful work. He was a great strength to the Religious Drama Society and a help in many other ways besides his honorary treasurership.

A questioner: Have the Arts Council been approached about New Pilgrim Players publicity?

Mr. Martin Browne: Yes, two years ago. They don't finance theatrical companies playing in variable conditions such as the New Pilgrim Players. They must, of course, raise the standard of theatrical art and although they admire the New Pilgrims they don't see artistic standards being helped much. The Arts Council are not likely to help with their present policy of raising the standard. Financial help will be essentially religious and from the evangelistic point of view.

Mrs. Baxter: Have we approached the King George's Jubilee Trust?

Mr. Martin Brown: Not yet.

A questioner: Could we have a postal ballot for the Executive so that there would not be elected *en bloc* but as individuals?

Mr. Duce: We should have more nominations and then we would have formal elections. We are three nominations short this year with twenty places and seventeen nominations.

The Chairman recalled the members' attention to the accounts.

There was a discussion on the disparity between this year's and last year's royalties and performing fees paid to the Society. Mr. Hogben pointed out that the Library income had increased this year.

Mrs. Baxter: The royalty question may in part be due to the feeling (widespread) that it is possible to produce a religious play without getting involved with that tiresome business of fees. Some people feel that if you

not sell tickets but have a collection you can avoid paying fees to authors or publishers.

A Canadian member: I come from Canada. There has just been formed a Religious Drama Society in Canada, The Christian Drama Council of Canada, under Miss Isabel Squires in Toronto. I would like to ask Mr. Martin Browne whether he intends to visit Canada when he goes to America, because he would be very hospitably welcomed?

Matters for discussion:

Mr. Hogben asked anyone who could spare time to come and help with tickets to give their names to Miss Lambert.

Mr. Trustram thanked Mr. Duce for acting as Chairman of Council and Mr. Martin Browne for chairing the general meeting in the afternoon.

The meeting was declared closed at 3.50 p.m., and members adjourned to the Giles-in-the-Fields to witness the dress rehearsal of R. H. Ward's *Holy Family*, the New Pilgrim Players.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

The Bruising of Satan. A. Simmons. (Epworth Press, 1/3.) H. 3 acts (1 hour). 4m., 2f. (Fee: 2/6.)

Christ in the Concrete City. P. W. Turner. (R.D.S./S.P.C.K., 3/6.) XH. Cont. act. 4m., 2w.

This Passion play was specially written for church performance by the New Pilgrim Players. Indebted to *The Way of the Cross* and *Holy Family* in technique, the play is more violent and colloquial than either. It hits hard at the sins that crucify Christ afresh in our own times—

“The calvary in your backyard
The scourge on the back of my kitchen door,
And the resurrection in the local cemetery.”

The dialogue uses modern prose and free verse. A chorus of six interpret the story of the Passion on three distinct levels: the universal (“something eternally true”), the historical (“something that happened once”), and the personal (“something that happens now”). (Fee: apply R.D.S.)

Christmas Unawares. A. G. Chant. (Epworth Press, 1/–.) H. 3 scenes. 18 char. (Fee: 2/6.)

The Devil in Antioch. Maud D. Reed. (Epworth Press, 3/6.) H. 3 acts, Prologue. 2m., 3w., 3 devils, 2 voices. “Proscenium Plays” series, No. 3.

An entertaining play for admirers of *The Screwtape Letters*.

Three devils, threatened with annihilation for incompetence, make every effort to secure a Christian family in first-century Antioch. We see how they encourage a variety of human failings to become sins, and how in the end their dark designs are foiled.

The producer's difficulty, as usual, will be to prevent the devils from becoming visible; otherwise the play presents a convincing message. (Fee: 10/6, 7/6.)

Eight Plays for Boys, containing *Abraham and Isaac*. N. L. Clegg. (Heinemann, 2/6.) H. 4b.

A short, simple dramatisation (for a class of boys) of the story of Abraham's sacrifice. (No fee.)

CHRISTIAN DRAMA

Escape from Herod. Charles W. Wright. (Epworth Press, 1/-.) H. 1 act. 6m.,
A one-act "thriller" for Epiphany, by the author of *The Man who Plays Judas*. A tough Roman soldier, guarding the Idumaeen border, connives at escape of the Holy Family from Herod's spies.

Particularly recommended for boys' clubs and youth groups. (Fee: 2/6.)

The Five Pound Note. C. J. Davey. (Methodist Missionary Society, 8d.) H. 1 act. 2w., 4b., 3g. (No Fee.)

God's Ambassador. H. H. S. Jackson. (Epworth Press, 9d.) H. 3 acts (1 hour). 4m., 2w. (Fee: 2/6.)

The Hope of the World. (Methodist Missionary Society, 4d.) H. 1 act. 1w., 2b., 3g. (No fee.)

Judas of Galilee. F. A. Evelyn. (Typescript.) H. 1 act. 5m., 2w., angel.

Judas of Galilee was the current pretender to the Messiahship at the time of the Nativity. The play contrasts the noise he made in the world with the quiet arrival of the Christ-child. (Fee: apply R.D.S.)

Lazarus. Meriol Trevor. (Typescript.) HX. 3 acts (1½ hours). 8m., 3w. Verse.

An interesting play for Holy Week, presenting the story of Easter from Lazarus' point of view, as an observer of the events in Jerusalem. The verse dialogue is crisp and sensitive, not overloaded with imagery. Its freshness of approach should make the play attractive to reasonably experienced players. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

No Easy Way. Patience Fetherston. (C.M.S., 1/-.) H. 1 act. 3m., 5w.

Set in a Christian "ashram" (community), this one-act play touches briefly and sympathetically on some of the problems of the young Church of South India.

A rather longer play on the same theme would be welcome. (No fee.)

No Room. Freda Collins and Alison Graham-Campbell. (Garnet Miller, 2/-.) H. 1 act (20 mins.) 1m. (n.s.), 8w., voice, carol singers.

The scene is the kitchen of the inn at Bethlehem. We see the women hard at work on the first Christmas Eve—harassed, cross, spiteful or unhappy. Only half-witted servant-girl can see the angels watching over the stable beyond.

A valuable addition to the short list of Christmas plays for women. (Fee: apply publishers.)

People who came to an Inn. V. I. Arlett. (Epworth Press, 9d.) H. 1 act. 4m., 2w. n.s. shepherds, kings, etc. (Fee: 2/6.)

Redemption in the Desert. C. W. Jeffreys. (Typescript.) H. 1 act (2 scenes). 4m., 2w. The story of Abraham the Hermit, and how he rescued his niece from evil. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

Ruth the Moabitess. F. A. Evelyn. (Typescript.) H. 1 act. 3m., 2w., angel, reaper. A simple dramatisation of the Book of Ruth. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

Sam Pollard. H. G. Arnold. (Epworth Press, 1/6.) H. 8 scenes (1 hour). 14m., 8w. (doubling poss.) (Missionary.) (Fee: 2/6.)

The Shining Tree. Beryl Brown. (Edinburgh House Press, 6d.) H. 1 act. Large cast of children. (Christmas.)

Temptation in the Desert. C. L. Jeffreys. (Typescript.) H. 1 act. 4m., 2w. (Fee: apply R.D.S.)

This Angel Business. Ivy A. Ireland. (National Union of Townswomen's Guild, 1/6.) H. 1 act. 6w.

A one-act play for women, about the unchristian gossip of a small community. Attractive, though it treats the subject rather superficially. (Fee: 12/6.)

The Treasure of St. Lawrence. A. A. Baker. (Typescript.) H. 1 act. 4m., 2w. children (n.s.)

A gay if somewhat apocryphal version of a famous story about St. Lawrence.

who was asked to produce the treasure of the Church and brought in a group of children.

The setting is a fairy-story court: king, queen and strong-minded princess, whose enthusiasm for St. Lawrence's teaching causes a crisis.

Recommended to groups wanting to convey a serious message with a light touch. (Fee: 7/6, 5/-.)

Triumph. Dorothea Flower. (Biddles Ltd., 2/6.) H. 3 acts. 7m., 4w., soldiers, crowd. (Christian historical.) (Fee: £5/5/-.)

Why the Angels Sang. Jonathan Field. (Typescript.) 1 act. 5m., 2w., 3 choirboys. Produced in the Church of St. Mary Woolnoth, at Christmas, 1955. (See review "Far and Wide.") (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

REFERENCE LIBRARY

Drama Festivals and Adjudications. C. Ede. (Herbert Jenkins, 5/-.)

A comprehensive guide to anyone intending to enter a play for a Festival, or who may be asked to adjudicate. Both aspects are dealt with helpfully and concisely.

"Practical Stage Handbooks" series.)

The Fourth Anthology. (Herbert Jenkins, 14/-.)

A varied collection of poems and extracts from plays, including passages from *The Man Born to be King*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, etc., for students of speech and drama.

Medieval and Early Tudor Period Plays; part one: the Mediaeval and Early Tudor period.

Lyn Oxenford (Garnet Miller, 5/-.)

This readable and amusing book gives detailed information on dress, furniture, manners and dances, for the years 1066-1550; with some advice to producers of mystery and Morality plays.

The Student World. Quarterly magazine of the World's Student Christian Federation. Vol. XLVIII, No. 2: Summer, 1955.

This number contains articles on "Dramatic Art as a means of Communication", by Daniel Atger, and "Writing an Industrial Play", by K. M. Baxter.

The Witnesses. Clive Sansom. (Methuen, 8/6.)

The Witnesses, a sequence of dramatic poems grouped round the Gospel story, originally published in 1952, has now been reprinted with other poems by the same author.

Recommended to solo verse-speakers, particularly for use at the Easter season.

Also Added to the Reference Library.

The Dramatic Expression of Religion. E. Parsons. (Epworth Press.)

An essay in book form, issued in 1945, primarily for Free Church readers. Notes on the origin of Religious Drama are followed by a consideration of its relation to worship and the Bible.

Giotto. Wm. Farquhar Payson. ("Great Painters" series.)

Monochrome reproductions of Giotto frescoes. The series on the life of St. Francis is of special interest to producers of "The Little Plays of St. Francis".

SETS NOW AVAILABLE

Christ in the Concrete City. P. W. Turner.

Crucifixion. T. C. Thomas.

The Good Man of the Mountains. Norman Nicholson. (3rd revised edition.)

FAR AND WIDE

Reports and Reviews of Religious Drama Activities in Great Britain and Overseas

Auckland, New Zealand

The Theatre Guild of New Zealand presented the **York Nativity Play** and the **Chester Deluge** for a series of performances in and around Auckland during the Christmas season, 1955.

The plays, which were very well received, were remarkable for the excellent verse-speaking of the cast, and the music was an integral part of the whole production. **The York Nativity** made a great impression with its beauty and gentleness, while **The Deluge** was felt to err a little on the side of over-boisterousness. It was considered by some critics to be too "mediaeval" a play to make a direct contact with the audience, who saw the Bible story at one further remove from reality.

Nevertheless, most of those who saw the productions found them satisfying and moving.

* * *

Barnstaple, Devon

The Christmas play presented by the girls of the Barnstaple Secondary Modern School was adapted from **A Christmas Mime**, arranged by Diana Carroll.

The theme—culminating in the Nativity—was, to quote from the text, "Parents who gave their children, and children who grew to be men valiant for God".

The Old Testament episodes were interpreted through choral singing, chorus speaking and tableaux, but mime was included in the New Testament scenes.

Chorus and choir—each of twenty voices—flanked the stage, their function being to introduce or explain each tableau and scene. Scriptural verse was used throughout, with the exception of short linking passages spoken by the Leader.

Curtains only were used, with the minimum of furniture and properties; but great attention had been paid to the costumes, particularly with regard

to historical accuracy, and the judicious use of lighting enhanced the beauty and realism of the scenes.

Accurate timing of the tableaux was essential, and presented the greater difficulty, but with the most efficient help of the girls responsible, it was effectively overcome.

* * *

Chichester

On Sunday evening, January 1956, the Canon Gate Players performed **The Story of Christmas in Mime** by E. Martin Browne, at Old Bosham Church. The choir of the church, under the leadership of the vicar, sang the required hymns and carols unaccompanied, and this proved most effective. The choir sat at the back of the church and the choir stalls had been removed so that the producer had ample space to arrange her groups. The church also provided eight small "angels" to form a screen when the crib was being brought on, and again when it was removed.

The Players felt that this very beautiful Mime was well received by the packed congregation.

City of London

(St. Mary Woolnoth)

Why the Angels Sang, a new play by Jonathan Field, was produced for the first time in this series of performances this Christmas in the Guild Church of St. Mary Woolnoth. Beginning at 5.45 and ending at approximately 6.40, the play was given at the best possible time for home-going City workers to attend, and large numbers saw it with absorbing and appreciative attention.

It is in fact scarcely a play at all—in one moment of real drama is quickly over—but a discussion between a few characters both of to-day, and history, about the true meaning of Christmas, in contrast to the commercialised Christmas. As a result, the sceptical verger, Fred Stockley,

ought to a deeper understanding of the season's significance.

The "Three Kings" of the play by Dickens ("A Christmas Carol"), Mendelssohn ("Hark, the Herald Angels"), and an office worker, who present gifts to Fred for the grandson whose birth is announced to him at the climax of the argument. The Vicar, Mrs. Goss (a church worker), and the angels represent the shepherds. The Madonna is seated in the congregation, and comes forward to speak the Magnificat.

The Angels Sang has a fine intention, and plays that really try to relate the Christmas story to the present day are very badly needed; moreover, there are some passages of sensitive and expressive writing that reveal the author's gifts. On the other hand, the play is disappointing in its failure to express the theme in *action*, and for a certain desultoriness. Several promising hares are started, but there simply is not time in an hour for the noblest hunter to deal satisfactorily with all of them. Also, the meaning of the offering of gifts to the new baby is not quite clear, and though in the opinion of the moment the theological confusion does not trouble one, afterwards questions begin to arise.

This play opens up great possibilities, however, that we must hope will be explored in future. B. J.

Widley, Essex

Wallace Nichols' *The Boy from the East* was produced for the second time by St. Barnabas' Drama Group, Widley, in November, to appreciate audiences.

This story of the traditional visit of the boy Christ to Cornwall, with his uncle Joseph of Arimathea, has all the strange fascination that hangs about the legends of Glastonbury, and evocative verse and the settings—the coast of Cornwall, the Ding Dong mine—make the most of it. On the other hand, it is hard not to feel that the author has sacrificed drama to atmosphere. For example, two moments of high excitement misfire, simply because they are treated perfunctorily: Bothak's change of heart at the point of murder; the struggle of

the women, torn between the call of the Druid's horn and the call of the Boy from the harbour. These conflicts could be fine drama, but the tension is dropped, much too soon, and no amount of verse-speaking can make up for it.

St. Barnabas' Group succeeded creditably in conveying the all-important "atmosphere". The three men seemed rather unhappy in their parts, but the women spoke with feeling, and one would like to have seen more of the small boy, Dobby.

The Boy himself is never seen, and though the stage device that keeps the Christ a few feet away in the wings can be irritating, in this case He successfully dominated the action.

Hereford

The Hereford Y.M.C.A. Players presented Christopher Fry's play, *A Sleep of Prisoners*, in the lovely fourteenth-century Church of All Saints, Hereford, on three evenings in November. Although the maximum seating for each performance was limited to two hundred, more than five hundred people attended during the three nights, and the audiences included the Mayor and Mayoress, the Dean, and many of the city's clergy and ministers.

—By permission of the *British Y.M.C.A. Review*.

Huddersfield Branch

A successful week-end course in Religious Drama was organised by the Huddersfield Branch of the R.D.S. in October, jointly with the Huddersfield Youth Committee. Miss Marion Watson took classes in practical work, and talks and films were also given.

The numbers attending the course were rather disappointing, but the secretary writes: "Those who came were most enthusiastic as to what they had got out of it, and it proved a very workable programme for both the 15-year-olds and the 70-year-old."

"I think what the group *did* get from it, from the practical point of view, was the sense of achievement, in working up to the expression of real issues from only the bare bones of

imagination. The schoolchildren said that they were quite worn out after such concentration. The older ones had been sceptical of getting any result through *doing* (rather than listening to lectures) for such a short period; but thought it worked very well in practice."

King's College, London

Murder in the Cathedral

This was an interesting production. Though the cast were all too young and the production at times ragged the force of the play was clearly to be felt and the performance greatly improved as it went on. The diction was excellent throughout and it was a delight to hear young, clear voices beautifully rehearsed as the Women of Canterbury. Derek Saville as Thomas had a fine voice and gave a most intelligent performance, though he had not the commanding presence or the experience to suggest the depths of the character; it was an intellectual performance. The chorus of the Women of Canterbury provided the vitality and nerves of the production; they were very fine though the individual scenes were uneven. The murder of Thomas was impressive, but the tension had not been sufficiently built up beforehand for the full force of the Knights' scene to be felt.

Some of the movements seemed uncertain, as was natural in a tour of this kind where rehearsals in each church could not have been possible. But attention was sometimes distracted by unnecessary or fussy movement as in the Tempters' scene. Immobility in Tempters is, of course, not essential, but one does feel that they would not fidget.

The lighting was very good and seen in a spacious Norman-style church the effect was fine. It would have been interesting to see it in the churches of different styles in which it was played. King's College Drama Society are to be congratulated on a promising venture.

F. G. P.

* * *

Mayfield, Sussex

The York Nativity, at St. Dunstan's Church, Mayfield, was a wonderful

performance. The church was packed yet there was a beautiful stillness with the quietly moving players and the rich colours of the medieval costumes. The music was very well done, especially the fine Gregorian chanting of the 84th Psalm.

Once into my mind came the thought of busy shops and queues and the Victorian poet's pity for us who see all sights from pole to pole and glare and nod and bustle by, and never once possess our soul before we die. Could he have withstood our Christmas bustle and the making of plays which we too often lose? The play and producer of *The York Nativity* deserve our grateful thanks for their inspiring and beautiful performance. —From Parish Magazine

Northampton

Doddridge Memorial Congregational Church

In October, James Bridie's *Tobias and the Angel* was presented for nights in the School Hall by the Drama Group. It was an ambitious venture for a church depending on its own talent, but full houses acclaimed it a great success.

The production was in the capable hands of Paddy Macquire, with sympathy with the theme of the play and appreciation of Bridie's humour resulted in a moving picture of what some religion. The costuming would have done credit to a professional company.

To portray Tobias well requires a wide range of gifts as well as youthful verve, and the player distinguished himself in his interpretation of successively timid, obedient, assertive and susceptible character. Act I, Scene I, could easily fall flat, but was saved from this by lively acting.

If the Archangel Raphael was handsome, he had an uncommonly good-looking representative. Raphael's influence dominates the play; it can be felt from the moment he appears until the final dénouement, and if we were to regret, it was that he did not impress his personality more forcefully upon the procession of events.

Having achieved such success in its first three-act play, however,

ama Group will undoubtedly be encouraged to consider attempting other religious plays of similar scope and repute.

* * *

Nottingham

St. Mary's Players

The presentation of the Nativity by the St. Mary's Players before the Council House in the Market Square Nottingham was a thing of great beauty, with much of the medieval simplicity about it. The clear and dignified mimetic action had the necessary boldness of outline to carry the action to the farthest point of the crowd. This action was admirably added to sensitive and unmannered singing from the Gospel. The skilful management of colour, line and grouping made the whole pictorially satisfying.

It was the quality and unity of the singing which so movingly communicated the Christmas message to the onlookers. One of the most striking tributes was the stillness of the angels, physically present throughout, which made the withdrawal of their ritual presence possible. Yet, with that inner power and economy of movement did they appear "praising and, and saying, Glory to God in the highest. . . ."

The arrival of the travellers at the end revealed so clearly the hurly-burly in which Mary and Joseph found themselves at this great moment of history. There was, too, great beauty in the parting of the shroud, so quietly divided and unfolded by the angels, to reveal the Virgin and Child in the stable.

The same beauty and dignity was carried over to the more popularised version given between the two films at the Odeon Cinema. Here the action itself, as it were, to be pinned and examined to the limit: the Virgin and Child, the visits of the Shepherds and the Kings, and the Adoration supported by single verses of carols sung by the choir of St. Mary's accompanied by the cinema organist.

It is difficult to evaluate the two treatments, but it is possible to compare certain aspects. The audience in the

one case was free to come and go as it pleased, a few hundred exposed to the bitter cold, as against the few thousands who had paid for comfort and warmth to see films. Outside, there was a voluntary concentration; within, there appeared to be a placid acceptance of the introduction of a religious note into the entertainment. At the curtain-fall there was "spontaneous applause".

In the Market Square, the cold starlit night, the dignified setting and the surrounding darkness contrasted favourably with the highly coloured lighting system in the cinema. The music in the cinema was ready-made and florid. In the Market Square it presented many problems, which seemed to lie in the need to satisfy the natural desire of the audience to participate in the singing of carols, and the difficulty of training limited vocal talent in first-class music.

The six presentations, three outside, three in the cinema, show vision on the part of the vicar and producer, Canon R. H. Hawkins. The co-operation so readily forthcoming on all sides speaks well for the regard the authorities have for him, and the faith he upholds. Perhaps here is the founding of a new tradition by this well-established and well-led group of players.

And what of the hearts and minds of the onlookers? Here was a beautiful and truly worthy act of worship which could not have failed to move those who saw it.

* * *

Putney

For their Christmas production in St. Mary's Hall, the Putney Church Dramatic Guild chose a most unusual and exciting Nativity play. This was **Christmas in the Market Place**, by Henri Ghéon.

In the play, a band of travelling gypsies are discovered on Christmas Eve, eating supper round their camp fire. To please a crowd of villagers (played by the audience), they decide to enact their own version of the Nativity story, dividing the various parts between the five of them.

By its very nature, therefore, the play was something of a makeshift affair. The players put on their cos-

tumes in view of the audience. Sometimes they stepped out of character in order to make a comment or give a direction. And yet by its very homeliness it brought home the Christian message. Here, one felt, was a play made by gypsies, and not by theologians or scholars with an eye for contemporary detail. The Roman lady wore the feathered hat and tight silk jacket of a gypsy. In the midst of her adoration of the Infant Christ, the old woman prayed to the patron saint of gypsies. Yet these anachronisms enhanced rather than detracted from the atmosphere. They clearly showed the simple, uncluttered faith of simple people.

It was fascinating to see how as the play progressed the gypsy players took on something of the stature of the characters they were portraying. For a few minutes the audience and the camp fire were lost in the greater glory. And then, as each little scene was played out, they became once again all gypsy.

The Putney Guild is to be congratulated on presenting with such sensitivity and devotion a play which will long remain in the minds and hearts of those who saw it.

—By permission of the *Wandsworth Borough News*.

* * *

Redhill and Reigate, Surrey

Gates of Hell was presented at Redhill Market Hall on November 23rd, 24th and 25th, by the Reigate and Redhill Council of Churches.

Most plays are either enjoyed or disliked by audiences, but this one, as several people remarked, had the effect of "making one think"; indeed so profound was its message and challenge on this occasion that few wished to talk immediately afterwards. It is emphatically a play which churchgoers alone can appreciate and one they desperately need. The audience felt that they were part of the timeless theme; from the beginning, when Sue Spanner rose slowly up from the body of the hall and stepped into High Heaven on the stage, and when Satan, the church caretaker, made his confident appeal to us, we were all in it

and saw ourselves and what we do from the angles of history and Heaven.

Production was good, and some characters were outstanding, but there was a certain unevenness throughout in that some actors grasped their parts fully and lived them, while others lacked experience. This was almost certainly due to the shortage of people offered for casting. If all the churches had given support *con amore* the weakness would have been obviated.

Costumes were effective, and those of Easter and Pentecost Angels called for special commendation. Gone were the white wings and nightgowns and cardboard haloes of popular fancy, and our eyes feasted on well-designed robes of symbolic colours.

Most gripping of all was the silent tableau concluding the Epilogue, with Satan gone, and the lighting throwing the Cross into lovely, stark relief.

H. F. W.

* * *

St. Teath, Cornwall

The Hillside Crib, by Freda Collier

This is not a Nativity play in the sense of representing the Christmas story directly, but it shows how the first Christmas Crib was made by Francis of Assisi at Greccio.

He is shown as a sad figure at the beginning of the play and explains that he is thinking of the hardships suffered by Mary and Joseph on the first Christmas night. In order to make this real to his Friars and the townsfolk he constructs a crib in a cave on the hillside and they all make a pilgrimage to it on Christmas Eve.

At St. Teath, the first part of the play was acted in the Church Hall, and then the cast, followed by the audience, processed into the church opposite where the "Hillside Crib" was already prepared. The presentation of the Nativity tableaux, spotlighted in the darkened church, at the east end of the nave which was without chairs (the pews were removed to the hall), was most impressive and moving.

Though ostensibly for children, parts can be taken, as at St. Teath, by both adults and children, and

ings, costumes and movements can be simple.

The St. Teath production was skilful without being elaborate, and all the players spoke clearly and unselfconsciously. This rather formalised type of play comes across exceptionally well on under- rather than over-acted.

Sevenoaks, Kent

The Chantry Mystical Players held their fourth Annual General Meeting at the Chantry, Sevenoaks, on January 1. Founded in the winter of 1951, the 'Mystical Players' first performance was the Nativity Play from the York Mystery, given in January 1952 in St. Mary's, Riverhead. Since then they have given ten performances in churches and ten in halls, and also in a hospital and Old People's Home, together with three performances of *Tobias and the Angel* in the open air. The other plays in their repertoire have been *Christ Crucified*, *Greater Love hath no man*, *The Boy with a Cart*, *Lines from The Acts of St. Peter*, *The Cry of the Cross*, *Noah*, and *Sensation Budleigh Beacon*.

They have succeeded in providing their own staging and the nucleus of a wardrobe. The programme they have acted at each year has been two productions in churches, and one to attract the general non-churchgoing public in a hall, with a play such as *John* or *Tobias*. In practice, it has been found that, financially, the membership, active and associate, is around 100, and includes a choir. At the annual General Meeting, Lt.-Col. C. Grant, a vice-president of the Religious Drama Society, and founder chairman of the Chantry Mystical Players since its inception until taken last summer, was elected president.

* * *

Sheffield

The Chester Miracle Plays

The Chester "Cycle", less well known than those of York and Coventry, proved an admirable concession to the Sheffield Christian Arts Festival when performed in the Montagu Hall for six nights early in November. As arranged by Betty and

Joseph McCulloch, the cycle makes three plays of one and a half to two hours each. The first play, *In the Beginning*, was judged to be the most effective. Sensitive lighting and grouping made the opening sequences memorable, and mime was used well in the Noah sequence, and elsewhere.

The *Nativity*, the second play, had been performed in the open in October, in a block of flats, a churchyard, and a playground, and this may partly account for a certain staleness in the indoor performance; but the structure of the play itself is less happy than the other two, apart from good moments with the shepherds. *The Passion* was well handled with the Crucifixion offstage.

The Christian Community Players, the acting group associated with the Sheffield Religious Drama Committee, put in an immense amount of work throughout the summer months on the Chester plays. Practically all the cast had to be recruited from scratch. An inner group of six were responsible for the production. Now there is a lively and much larger group, with this achievement behind them, waiting for more opportunities. G. H.

* * *

South Stainley, Yorks.

The producer writes:

South Stainley is a small village between Harrogate and Ripon. The Drama Group consists of only eleven members, all in some way connected with farming. It began four years ago, and from a humble beginning with a very simple Nativity play it has become more ambitious. The play last Christmas was *Beginning of the Way*, by Henzie Raeburn. This was produced at St. Wilfrid's Church, South Stainley, on the Sundays before and after Christmas, and it was sincerely and movingly presented. All props and costumes are made by the members of the Group.

Stepney. St. Dunstan's Church

Go Down Moses

When rehearsals began, the Rector of Stepney, the Rev. C. Edwyn Young,

described the venture as "an evangelistic effort." That was the most we could hope for. A polished performance was patently impossible. But then, what higher aim could there be for any group of Christians?

Of the whole cast, only two or three had ever been on a stage before, and we had only six weeks! For myself I wouldn't have gone within ten miles of the affair, but one just can't say no to our rector. One was tempted to admire the courage and optimism of Miss Pamela Keily the producer, and to reserve judgment on her sense of reality.

But she was right and we were wrong. If her heart was not utterly broken in the first week, then our spirit almost was. Lines so carefully memorised at home evaporated on stage. Even at dress rehearsal I did not expect the miracle to happen . . . but it did.

The two nights of the play produced an "atmosphere" backstage that can never be put into words. It wasn't only the patient, skilled work of Pamela Keily; it wasn't only the grinding hard work of the ordinary folk of Stepney; it wasn't only the fact that each performance was preceded by prayers on stage. It was a combination of all plus the fact that everybody believed in what they were doing with a very real sincerity. I can vouch for the fact that one man was so enthralled by the verbal duel between Satan and Michael that he only recalled himself in the nick of time to avoid "fluffing" his own lines.

One hopes that the audience were uplifted by the performance. I believe they were, but the whole thing was more than worth while if only as a spiritual exercise for the cast.

What was it like from the point of view of the audience? Unfortunately I am the very last man to be able to assess that because you see, in the words of Philip Lamb's wonderful little play . . . "My name is

MOSES."

* * *

Tetherdown

The courage and enterprise that led Peggy Thornborough to produce R. H. Ward's *Holy Family* for Christmas on

December 18th in Tetherdown were well rewarded by the rapt attention with which the play was followed by a large audience.

The scenes of the individual incidents in the life of the Holy Family shone out like jewels in a fine setting, and the poignancy of some of them, particularly the "no room at the inn" scene, brought tears to the eyes.

—From Parish Magazine

The Producer writes:

This production really began about three years ago when the producer first saw the New Pilgrims present *Holy Family* at Coventry and later again while at the R.D.S. Drama School, Worcester. For a long time she felt the play was too ambitious to attempt, but gradually the idea of attempting it grew till a year ago she started working on it. By the time she went to the year's Drama School at Culham the play had been cast and rehearsals were scheduled to start in September. She still felt a bit "jittery" about the prospect and went to Culham looking for help. She did not look in vain. Work with Mr. Bellamy in the "Women of Canterbury" chorus, *Murder in the Cathedral* proved of inestimable value, and quiet words on the lawn with Jessie Powell about choral work opened the imagination still further. Finally, in the middle of rehearsals, the producer took four of the cast to see the New Pilgrims' *Holy Family* in St. Giles' Church. She had a rehearsal that evening and there was a marked improvement to be seen as a result of this!

So it can easily be seen how much is owed to the R.D.S. We have learnt much—in stagecraft, and also in the meaning of our faith, and for this we owe much to the author, R. H. Ward. It is a humbling thing to receive letters of thanks after the production in which is given not only appreciation of the acting and production, but also statements like this one: "The diction and precision were excellent, and the outstretched arms on the Cross and the wonderful portrayal of 'It is finished' seemed to bring the tragedy nearer than many a wonderful picture has done to me."

P. T.

* * *

Vancouver, Canada

An interdenominational group of players, organised by Charles W. Wright (author of *The Man who played Judas*), and which tours a number of Vancouver churches regularly, is now five or six years old. They have built up a tradition in religious plays of their own, presenting as a rule, two new productions a year, often plays specially written for them by Mr. Wright.

Their most recent production was taken on tour this autumn: *The Road to Bethel*, once more by Mr. Wright; and a laudatory report in the *Vancouver Sun* shows that the Pilgrim Players ("Pacific Coast style") are becoming widely known and appreciated.

* * *

Wednesbury, Staffs

Drama and Mission: the Methodist Church, Wednesbury

Our search was for the almost impossible. We wanted a play that could provide entertainment for all who wanted merely to be entertained, yet with a compelling Christian message for all who were prepared to read between the lines. A modern play, with as few characters as possible, and suitable for an industrial Midlands town.

Despite the illness of our producer, Nelson" taken to hospital just before the final performance, "Mrs. Craggs" with an injured hand, *Plan Overboard* proved to be our play. The deputy producer worked wonders during the final fortnight, and undoubtedly *Plan Overboard* got across.

Immediately the performance ended the soloist sang a carefully selected hymn as an attempt to pin-point the intention of the play. There followed three or four minutes of speaking by the minister in order to clinch, as it were, the Christian propaganda which, from the start, was the whole intention of our enterprise. Afterwards, a silence and a very brief prayer.

In those moments we knew, even did not many told us afterwards, that anxious thought had been provoked, private prayers offered, and lives committed and recommitted to the care

and service of Our Lord, Who, like the author in *Plan Overboard*, in compassion broke His way into the life of the world He had created, in order by suffering to bring salvation.

E. B.

* * *

Whitstable

Two performances of Vera Cumberlege's *He Came Unto His Own* were given in All Saints Parish Church, Whitstable, by a cast which contained several experienced adult members of the congregation, as well as members of the Senior Youth Fellowship and a group of young children.

The curate, who as a second narrator spoke the words of "The Voice of God" and "The Voice of Christ", both by his interpretation and by his beautiful voice and diction created the atmosphere in which the play moved.

The first narrator's lovely voice and quiet dignity were most impressive. Both narrators were visible to the congregation, standing at the foot of the steps which led up to the raised stage in the chancel.

A fine interpretation was given alike of the Tempter's malevolence and of his ingenuity. The role of the Enquirer was also in experienced hands, and the full value of this key part of the play was brought out.

The other parts were well-sustained, for many members of the S.Y.F. have by this time considerable experience of Religious Drama. The children were delightfully natural, and their unaccompanied singing of "How far is it to Bethlehem?" was beautiful and moving. Carols were sung by an invisible choir, and organ music excellently played by the assistant organist, who is a member of the S.Y.F.

The curate began every rehearsal with prayer, and all the cast who could do so came to a corporate communion on the morning of the first production. Before the play began the Vicar led the congregation in prayer, and a hymn was sung; and at the end the Benediction was pronounced from the altar.

Many of the still, receptive congregation were regular worshippers; but others were there who rarely come to church, whose attitude at the beginning

CHRISTIAN DRAMA

may well have been that of the Enquirer in the play; and they joined with him in worship at its close.

This is an original play, which puts the Christmas story in a new setting, linking it with the O.T. narrative and prophecies, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and the work of the apostles after Pentecost. The introduction of an Enquirer, challenging what is happening, voicing the doubts of the Man in the Pew, representing his search for Truth, is extremely effective.

With its large cast, frequent changes of scene, and its long time-span, this is not a play for the inexperienced. But in the right hands it proved that

Religious Drama is a wonderful instrument for revealing the message of the Gospel.

* * *

The Editor of CHRISTIAN DRAMA is always glad to receive reports of productions, etc., for inclusion in "Faith and Wide". If possible, ask an independent observer to write 200-300 words for you, and post it to the Editor, care of the R.D.S. office.

Please do not send newspaper cuttings, as these cannot be reproduced without the written permission of the proprietors.

THE LONDON ACADEMY OF MUSIC AND DRAMATIC ART

Tower House, Cromwell Road, London, S.W.5.

PRINCIPAL
MICHAEL MACOWAN

TWO-YEAR STAGE TRAINING

The Course starts each year in September, and proceeds from the fundamental principles to the most practical needs of the theatre of to-day. The number of students is limited to 60.

Young men who have done their national service may be considered for scholarships.

The new prospectus gives a full description of the curriculum and teaching methods.

Apply to Secretary

THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN

An interdenominational body working in association with S.P.C.K.

Patron

HIS GRACE THE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

President

THE LORD BISHOP OF CHICHESTER

Chairman of Council

E. MARTIN BROWNE, ESQ., C.B.E.

Hon. Treasurer

JOHN H. L. TRUSTRAM, ESQ.

Hon. Advisers

Design: MISS S. M. PEARCE *Music:* C. LE FLEMING, ESQ.

Foreign Relations: MISS JOAN FORD

The object of this Society, founded in 1929, is "To foster the art of drama as a means of religious expression and to assist the production of plays which explore and interpret the Christian view of life."

National Secretary

E. N. HOGBEN, ESQ.

Travelling Adviser

MISS CARINA ROBINS

Librarian

MISS BRENDA JACKSON

Director of New Pilgrim Players

MISS PAMELA KEILY

Publicity Officer

D. LINNELL, ESQ.

Assistant Adviser

MISS URSULA NICHOLL

Office at

166 SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, LONDON, W.C.2

Telephone: Covent Garden 3304/5

Services and subscriptions are listed on inside of back cover

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
1. <i>Editorial</i>	3
2. " <i>Murder</i> " <i>Comes of Age</i> , by E. MARTIN BROWNE .	4
3. " <i>Murder in the Cathedral</i> " <i>Quiz</i>	7
4. <i>The Next Twenty-One Years</i> , by K. M. BAXTER .	8
5. <i>Notes from the Back Pew</i>	12
6. <i>A Question of Standards</i> , by CHRISTOPHER EDE .	13
7. " <i>The Power and the Glory</i> ", by DONALD FITZJOHN .	16
" <i>The Vanishing Island</i> ," by URSULA NICHOLL . .	18
8. <i>News from the Continent</i>	19
9. <i>New Publications</i>	20
10. <i>Far and Wide</i>	23